

~~TOP SECRET~~DRV MANPOWER, ARMED FORCES AND REINFORCEMENT CAPABILITYManpower and Mobilization Potential

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Nevertheless, it does not appear that North Vietnam is encountering insurmountable problems in obtaining sufficient able-bodied men to support the war in South Vietnam. Of North Vietnam's total population of over 18 million, about 4 million or so are males between 15 and 49, and about half of these are probably physically fit for military service. At present, the North Vietnamese Armed Forces have taken less than one-quarter of the fit males aged 15 to 49 and less than two-fifths of the approximately 1.2 million fit males in the prime military ages of 17 to 35. Though there is some evidence of lowering of draft standards and extending of age limits, it appears that, with a few local exceptions, Hanoi is still drafting only those between the ages of 17 and 35.

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ESTIMATED NORTH VIETNAMESE ARMED FORCES

1 October 1967

SUMMARY

Army	447,500
Air Force	4,500
Navy	2,500
Armed Public Security Forces	16,500
TOTAL Armed Forces	471,000

North Vietnamese Army Breakdown

Out-of-Country	
South Vietnam	54,000 (+20,000 -- 304th/320th Division)
Laos	18,000
TOTAL	72,000 (92,000)
In-Country	
Infantry	171,500
Air Defense ^a	93,000
Other ^b	111,000
TOTAL	375,500

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^aThis includes only regular army personnel in AAA units, radar, and SAM battalions. It does not include part-time air defense personnel such as militia, or logistical troops supporting air defense.

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Reinforcement Capability

The best precedent available which establishes the speed with which the DRV can dispatch troops to the south has been furnished by the recently-completed southward deployment of the 304th Division and the 320th Division to the Khe Sanh/DMZ area from North Vietnam.

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Should deployments be made to areas farther south, for instance the B-3 Front area, the time frame would of necessity be increased.

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4 March 1968

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT : Present Status of RVNAF

REFERENCE: USMACV 031510Z SECRET/EYES ONLY

1. Summary of referenced message:

General Westmoreland expects that a full assessment of the status of RVNAF as of 29 February will be available on 17 March. He has forwarded the following information, however, as an interim report in response to General Wheeler's request.

ARVN Regular Forces: A total of 14,428 replacements were furnished to ARVN regular units. Personnel losses (killed, wounded, and missing) thus far reported total 8,754. This figure does not include any personnel losses due to desertion, sickness or disease. We simply can not tell whether (or to what extent) these figures cover personnel AWOL or absent on Tet leave.

Of the total 155 maneuver battalions assigned as of 19 February 1968, 98 were considered combat effective. As of 1 March 1968, 118 battalions are considered combat effective -- an increase of 20 battalions in 10 days. General Westmoreland states "this indicates a concerted effort on the part of the Vietnamese Joint General Staff (JGS) to bring units up to effective fighting strength as rapidly as possible."

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RVN Regional Forces: Advisors of 909 RF companies have reported in "Present for Duty" strengths. The average strength reported was 99. The average authorized strength for these units is 123.

RVN Popular Forces: Advisors reported on 4,365 PF Platoons. These platoons had an average "Present for Duty" strength of 29. The average authorized strength for these units is 35.

VN Air Force: Not affected by any personnel losses.

Performance During Tet Offensive: Reports are not yet complete, but "overall reports indicate satisfactory performance."

Personnel (General): Estimates by JGS indicate that personnel requirements through the end of FY 68 can be satisfied. General Westmoreland states that "assuming no increase in enemy activity, the RVNAF training base can accomplish the training programmed by CY 68."

Logistics/Equipment: Significant items destroyed or severely damaged are as follows:

Armored Personnel Carriers	64
M41 Tanks	24
One-Ton Trucks	59
Two and one-half Ton Trucks	160
105mm Howitzer	3
60mm Mortar	63
H34 Helicopters	6
Other aircraft	17

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2. Comments:

a. ARVN

When the referenced report is stripped of peripheral data, it is clear that we still do not have a current evaluation of the status of ARVNAF. The 14,428 replacements furnished to units suffering 9,754 personnel losses still does not get at the crucial question of what the current on duty strength of ARVN regular forces is. The current proportion of the 155 maneuver battalions considered as combat effective averages 76 percent country-wide, incorporating proportions ranging from 50 percent in IV Corps to 100 percent in II Corps. Given the speed of the increase in combat effectiveness (20 battalions in 10 days), it is likely that the term "combat effective" is being used to refer solely to strength only. Given the type of personnel input, -- draft dodgers, military prison inmates, etc. -- it is reasonably clear that measurement of "combat effectiveness" in this manner does not give us a very meaningful picture of how ARVN will stand up to future Communist assaults or, for that matter, its current strengths.

b. RF/PF

The data presented for RF/PF units is no more illuminating than that given for ARVN regular battalions, principally because the strengths reported are compared to "authorized" strengths rather than to actual strengths prior to Tet. The fact that some 30 days subsequent to the Communist offensive COMUSMACV is able to obtain reports from only 60 percent of the Regional Forces and 85 percent of the Popular Forces, however, is a reasonably dismal picture by itself. The reporting for these forces as of 1 March 1968 leaves 83,000 RF/PF personnel unaccounted for. The cable does not address the current status of civilian Irregular Defense Group (CIDG) personnel. It is possible that the RF/PF situation is somewhat more disheartening than indicated by General Westmoreland. Agency reporting in IV Corps, for example, notes that at least 200 of the 2,000 RF/PF outposts in that area had been overrun.

c. General

Although General Westmoreland comments on the effects of personnel losses on leadership potential only in regard to the RVN Airborne Division, it would appear likely that similar conditions affect other RVNAF units.

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Qualified cadre have always been in short supply for RVNAF regular and irregular groups and it is unlikely that those lost during the Tet offensive can be replaced satisfactorily by the derelicts now entering the personnel pipeline. Evaluations of the impact of personnel losses in the leadership category can only be made in the field. We believe, however, that leadership cadre losses have probably been more serious than the MACV cable indicates and that they can take some appreciable time (say several months) to repair.

It is also worth noting that the information concerning the on-duty personnel in the RF/PF comes essentially from low-level GVN sources. It is not based on a high-level GVN, or even US, head count. Although we have no hard information on it, we strongly suspect that the reported count of RF/PF may have been exaggerated by the GVN sources.

One rather disturbing fact emerging from General Westmoreland's cable is that two of ARVN's best units -- the Marine Brigade and the Airborne Division -- suffered extremely heavy losses. While this is cited principally as an example of the importance of qualitative, as well as quantitative, effects of the Communist offensive, it is worth noting that General Westmoreland has refrained from assessing the impact of this loss. His cable, moreover, does not provide very meaningful statistics on RVNAF wounded-in-action, inasmuch as the WIA figure presented fails to distinguish between trivial and permanently disabling wounds. In short, the interim assessment provided by General Westmoreland presents interesting and, in some cases, relevant data on the current state of RVNAF but fails to come to grips with the problem of assessing the capability of RVNAF to cope with the Communist offensive.

George A. Carver, Jr.
Special Assistant for Vietnamese Affairs

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